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State Confirms First Cases of West Nile Virus in 2005 Two Infected Males in Valencia, Bernalillo counties

The New Mexico Department of Health announced today that two adult males from Valencia and Bernalillo counties have tested positive for West Nile Virus infection.

The 44-year-old man from Bernalillo County had milder symptoms, such as headache and fever while the 37-year-old man from Valencia County was hospitalized with more severe neuroinvasive disease. He has been released from the hospital.

In addition to these human cases, local mosquito control personnel in Dona Ana County have collected mosquitoes from Sunland Park that have tested positive for West Nile Virus.

“West Nile is one of the few diseases where people can take some simple precautions, such as using a repellent when outdoors, and be protected,” said Secretary of Health Michelle Lujan Grisham. “It is especially important for people to avoid mosquito exposure as the summer progresses and the number of mosquitoes increases.”

In 2004, New Mexico’s first human case was in May, and there were 88 laboratory-confirmed cases with four fatalities. In 2003, New Mexico’s first case was in July, and there were 209 lab-confirmed cases with four fatalities.

“West Nile Virus can cause flu-like symptoms, such as fever, nausea, headache, and muscle aches,” said Paul Ettestad, the state public health veterinarian at the New Mexico Department of Health. “If someone feels they have the flu and are feeling sick, they should see their health care provider. People over the age of 50 are at most risk for serious disease from West Nile Virus.”

Both meningitis and encephalitis can be fatal, especially in the elderly. However, most people who become infected have either no symptoms or mild symptoms. Less than 1 percent of all people infected, including those who have no symptoms and have not been tested, develop meningitis or encephalitis. Meningitis is an infection of the lining around the brain, while encephalitis is an infection of the brain itself.

The Department of Health continues to recommend that people take the following steps to reduce the risk of West Nile infection:

- Stay indoors at dawn, dusk and in the early evening.
- Wear long-sleeved shirts, long pants and socks whenever you are outdoors.

- Products containing DEET or Picaridin can provide longer lasting protection. Use insect repellent products with no more than 35 percent DEET for adults and follow the directions on the label for children from ages 2-12. Natural products containing soybean oil or oil of lemon eucalyptus have also been shown to be effective but need to be applied more often.
- Keep windows and doors closed if not screened. If you leave your house doors or windows open, make sure they have screens that fit tightly and have no holes.
- Do not allow water to stagnate in old tires, flowerpots, trash containers, swimming pools, birdbaths, pet bowls, etc.
- Horse owners should contact their veterinarian to have their horses vaccinated against West Nile Virus.

In addition, insect repellants should never be used on pets, according to the National Animal Poison Control Center, which is part of the University of Illinois College of Veterinary Medicine. Dogs and cats tend to lick themselves and can ingest toxins, which could harm them significantly more than the West Nile Virus. So far both species have been fairly resistant to the virus.

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